

A Chance To Meet Thomas Jefferson

by Lynne Belluscio

Midst the snow and wind, it's sometimes good to think ahead to spring. This year, the Historical Society is sponsoring a spring trip to Colonial Williamsburg to tour the gardens, attend a concert at the Governor's Palace and have a hearty dinner at the King's Arms Tavern as well as a whole day in the historic village.

There's a good possibility that we'll run into George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. There is a curious connection between the LeRoy family and Thomas Jefferson. Several years ago while I was surfing the net looking for LeRoy records I discovered two letters in the Online Library of Liberty that were written by Thomas Jefferson to LeRoy and Bayard – the company owned by Herman LeRoy and William Bayard.

It seems that Jefferson owed LeRoy and Bayard a sizable amount of money. On July 5, 1822, Jefferson wrote "After the delays of my last bond with which I have been indulged I consider it my bounded duty to obey the call for the principal whenever required... My own annual income arises from the culture of tobacco and wheat. These articles, from the interior country cannot be got to market till the spring of the year ..."

A year later, Jefferson once again made excuses for the delay of payment on his loan. "You have reason to believe I am unmindful that I ought ere this



to have remitted you the amount of my last bond; but it is duly in mind altho' delayed. My resources for payment as stated to you on former occasions, the produce of my farms. They have usually got to Richmond in June; down the river and time for inspection and sale, I shall be able to remit you one half the amount by the end of this month and the other half soon after. I have thought it a duty to remove suspense on the subject. Always acknowledgment the kindness of your indulgence I salute you ever with friendship and respect."

I have no idea how much Jefferson had borrowed from LeRoy and Bayard, but it was a well

known fact that Jefferson was in serious financial trouble. He inherited a sizable debt from his father-in-law. He also enjoyed an expensive life style, importing wine from France and expensive furnishing for Monticello.

After the British burned Washington DC during the War

of 1812, destroying the new Library of Congress, Jefferson sold his personal library in an effort to get out from under some of his debt. In 1818, Jefferson extended a loan to a friend who died before he could pay Jefferson back. It is estimated that at the time of his death in 1826, Jefferson was between \$1 million to \$2 million in debt. Five years later, his family was forced to sell Monticello. I do not know if Jefferson ever paid his debt to LeRoy and Bayard.

Another curious twist to the story is that Jefferson, when he was President of the United States, vehemently opposed Alexander Hamilton's plan to establish a national bank. In fact Jefferson believed that control of the monetary system by the banks would destroy the nation. Herman LeRoy certainly aligned his views with Hamilton. In fact Hamilton was the lawyer for LeRoy and Bayard and established the powerful Bank of New York.

Herman LeRoy served as president of the Bank of New York. So even though Jefferson's thoughts were not aligned with Herman LeRoy, he did not hesitate to go to LeRoy and Bayard for money. Jefferson was able to avoid his creditors because of his reputation and the respect

they had for the former president. Perhaps if we run into Jefferson in Williamsburg, we can tell him we are representatives of Herman LeRoy and wonder if he will be able to pay off his loans.

If you are interested in joining us for the trip, we will be leaving on Mother's Day, Sunday at 8 a.m. We will spend the first night at the Fredricksburg Hospitality House in Fredricksburg, Virginia. Dinner will be on your own. The next morning we will have a bus tour of Historic Fredricksburg before we head to Williamsburg where we will check into the Williamsburg Woodlands Inn adjacent to the historic district.

The trip includes passes to Colonial Williamsburg, with shuttle service available. At 5:45 we will all meet at the King's Arms Tavern for dinner followed by a Grand Medley of 18th Century Entertainment. Tuesday begins with guided tours of the gardens in small groups. The rest of the day is spent in the Historic District and lunch and dinner on your own. We have reserved seats for a concert at the Governor's Palace at 7:30. We will return to LeRoy on Wednesday. The cost of the trip is \$564 per person. If you want more information or a registration sheet, call 585-768-7433.

